

Willowbrook Must Educate Woman: Court

By ROGER WETHERINGTON

A State Supreme Court justice ruled yesterday that state officials had been "derelict" in their duty to train and care for a retarded woman at Willowbrook, and he ordered them to begin educating her to the limit of her abilities.

Justice Vito J. Titone said the State Department of Mental Hygiene had violated the state's mental law requiring that retarded persons be given treatment of "high quality and effectiveness." He gave state officials 30 days to devise a program to teach the woman the "elementary functions that she is capable of."

Although the decision applied to only one Willowbrook resident, Adrienne Renelli, 22, legal experts said, it had implications for many other Willowbrook residents who are given essentially custodial care and little or no training.

The justice, sitting in Staten Island, where Willowbrook is situated, said placing Miss Renelli in Willowbrook without attempting treatment was unconstitutional, constituting "imprisonment." She was "warehoused and ignored," he said, and tested only once for educability.

That was when she entered Willowbrook in 1960.

Rep. Mario Biaggi (D-R-C-N.Y.), who brought the action nearly a year ago on behalf of Miss Renelli's parents, John and Amelia of 2553 Radcliff Ave., Bronx, said he would apply to Justice Titone to expand the ruling to include every Willowbrook resident.

Titone rejected charges by the Renellis that their daughter had been abused physically. He said there was insufficient evidence to support the contention. The State Department of Mental Hygiene declined comment on the decision.

STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE, Tuesday, January 23, 1973

Court rules Willowbrook must teach

Supreme Court Justice Vito J. Titone today ordered the state Mental Hygiene Department and Willowbrook State School to provide treatment and care for a 22-year-old profoundly retarded resident at Willowbrook in a decision on a suit brought by the girl's parents.

The girl, Adrienne Renelli, entered the school in 1960 and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Renelli of the Bronx, charged in their court action brought last August that the state was responsible for her regression during the last 13 years. They were represented by Congressman Mario Biaggi of the Bronx.

In his decision, Titone charged that Adrienne was "warehoused" at Willowbrook during her stay and ruled the state was "derelict" in its duties.